

THE SECRETS OF LASTING LOVE
40 Days of Love – Part 6
Rick Warren

God: “I will show you my love forever. So says the Lord who saves you.”
Isaiah 54:8 (TEV)

“I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you.” John 15:12 (NLT)

“Love never stops being patient, never stops believing, never stops hoping, never gives up.”
1 Cor. 13:7 (GW)

1. LASTING LOVE _____

“Love never stops being patient” 1 Cor. 13:7a (GW)

“...puts up with anything” (MSG)

“... patiently accepts all things” (NCV)

“...is always ready to make allowances” (NJB)

“Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.” Eph. 4:2 (NLT)

2. LASTING LOVE _____

“Love never stops believing” 1 Cor. 13:7b (GW)

“...always trusts” (NIV)

“... never loses faith” (NLT)

“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Gal. 5:6 (NIV)

3. LASTING LOVE _____

“Love never stops hoping” 1 Cor. 13:7c (GW)

“...always expects the best” (LB)

“...always looks for the best” (MSG)

4. LASTING LOVE _____

“Love never gives up” 1 Cor. 13:7d (GW)

“...endures through every circumstance” (NLT)

“...always perseveres” (NIV)

“...never looks back, but keeps going to the end” (MSG)

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Nov. 1-2, 2008

Good morning! Good to see you! You know that for the last twenty-two days our family has been in crisis with Jaime, my daughter-in-law. Over the last three weeks she has gone through three surgeries – the first one was a twenty-hour surgery. She would have died if they had not done that surgery. Just ten weeks ago she had her first baby prematurely. That was a pretty interesting experience too because she had a very difficult pregnancy on that.

Whenever you're going through massive change there is one thing you can always count on that never changes. It is the unchanging love of God. It never changes. It is constant. It is steadfast. It is unchanging. It is unwavering. It is enduring. The Bible says this *"I will show you my love forever."* In other words it's eternal. God's love does not change. *"I will show you my love forever,' so says the Lord who saves you."*

The foundation for a stable life, no matter what you go through in life, is the unchanging love of God. I know that a lot of things will change in my life. But one thing I know will never change is that God will never stop loving me.

Here's the catch. God commands you to give that same kind of unchanging love to everybody else. Jesus said *"I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you."* That means reliable, unchanging, consistent, steadfast, unwavering, eternal, enduring love.

How do you do that? Euripides once said, "It's not real love unless it's eternal." Is that possible? Is it possible to even have a love that lasts an entire life?

The divorce rate in America is now forty-one percent of all first marriages. Forty-one percent. The divorce rate for second time marriages is sixty percent. And the divorce rate for third marriages is seventy-three percent. The odds get less likely.

How is it that you can have a love that lasts a lifetime? Loving other people in the same way that God loves you – consistently, unconditionally, eternally?

I think it was Mark Twain who once said "You don't really understand perfect love until you've been married at least a quarter of a century." I think there's some wisdom in that. To me, love at first sight, is no big deal. It's just attraction and arousal. To me the miracle is when people have looked at each other for an entire life and still love each other. That's the miracle. Love at first sight is no big deal. Love that lasts a lifetime – that is a big deal!

That's what we're going to look at this weekend. In fact, let me just ask you how many of you have been married or if your spouse is already in heaven, you've been married at least twenty-five years. Congratulations! Let me ask, those of you who have been married forty years or longer, would you stand up and stay standing a minute? Great! I want to ask all of *you* to come to the stage right now and help me teach this message. Anybody here been married fifty years or longer? Would you stand up? Fantastic!

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Here's my question to you – those of you who have been married fifty years or longer – it was easy, right?

I can guarantee you this; if you were to take any of these people and ask them to share their testimonies of their marriage they would tell you that it was not easy. That it is difficult to stay in love, to stick together. There are a million times in life when every bone in your body says, "This is too hard. I give up. I quit. I'm moving out." But they didn't.

If you're going to build a love that lasts a lifetime you have to figure out how to overcome what I call the Deadly D's. Every relationship whether it's a friendships or a marriage goes through the Deadly D's – Difficulties, Disagreements, Differences, Discord, Disappointment, Defeat, Dead-ends, Depression, Delay, Doubt, Distance, Death, Debt, Demands, Difficulties. Those are not easy things to overcome. But those who just stood overcame the big D – Divorce.

How do you have a love that lasts a lifetime? There's some things that you must *never do* if you're going to build a love that lasts a lifetime.

Back in the late 60s there was a group called the Association – a music group. Anybody remember this group? In 1967 they did a number one hit called "Never My Love." The interesting thing about that song is that it also went back in the last forty years to number one, four other times recorded by three other groups. It just kept coming back.

Today we're going to look at the things you must *never do* if you're going to build a love that lasts a lifetime.

We're in 1 Corinthians 13, the passage we've looked at for all of these weeks during 40 Days of Love. It says this in verse 7 "*Love never stops being patient, never stops believing, never stops hoping, never gives up.*" These are the habits of a lifetime of loving.

If you're going to learn to love other people the way that God loves you, if you're going to learn how to have a lasting love that makes it all the way through life, you have to develop the four habits that are talked about in this verse we just read.

1. The first thing that you have to learn to do is you have to learn that **lasting love extends grace.**

No relationship will make it without grace. The Bible tells us that this is part of love. You're not going to have a relationship unless you have forgiveness, mercy, patience, acceptance, grace. You've got to cut people some slack. You've got to let things pass. You have to put up with a lot. Everybody agree with that? You have to put up with a lot! You have to extend grace.

The Bible says this "*Love never stops being patient.*" The Message paraphrase of that verse says "*It puts up with anything.*" The New Century Translation says "*It patiently accepts all things.*" And the New Jerusalem Bible translation says "*It is always ready to make allowances.*" You have to allow for mistakes.

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This word in Greek that says “It’s always patient,” is the word that means literally “covered with a roof.” Would you buy a house without a roof? Of course not. You’d have no protection from the winds and the rain. A roof covers and protects your home.

In the same way this kind of love, patient love, gracious love, it covers a relationship and it lets some things slide. It doesn’t haul people into account for every mistake that they make. People damage pretty easily and you need a roof on your relationship. That roof is the kind of love that extends grace.

Why is grace essential to relationships?

Because you married a sinner. And she married a bigger one. You’re imperfect, your spouse is imperfect. If you’re in a relationship, you’re imperfect and your friend is imperfect. Two imperfect people will never create a perfect relationship. It isn’t going to happen. There’s no such thing as a perfect marriage, so stop trying to find one. There’s no such thing as a perfect friendship; stop trying to find one. Two imperfect people cannot create a perfect relationship. It isn’t gonna happen on this planet.

The Bible says this in Romans 3:10 *“There is no one who always does what is right, not even one.”* None of us get it right a hundred percent of the time. The next verse says *“If we say we have no sin, we’re only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth.”* In other words if you think the relational problems in your life are all the other person’s fault, you’re out of touch with reality. The truth is we all make mistakes. It takes two to tango and it takes two to tangle. It takes two to disagree. It’s never just one person’s fault. There’s always a part on both sides.

The Bible says we have to extend grace to each other. Why? Because forgiveness is a two way street. You don’t want to burn the bridge that you need yourself to walk over to get into heaven. Jesus said, we cannot receive what we’re unwilling to give to other people.

The Bible tells us that the way you build strong relationships is to treat other people the way God treats you. Romans 15:7 says this *“Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you.”* You accept them. That’s extending grace.

One of the ways you accept people is simply by listening to them. When you listen to people you’re giving them a great gift. Grace listens. Because the reason you get so judgmental is you’re not really listening to the other person. You’re not listening to where they’re coming from, what they’re saying. God gave you two ears and one mouth – that’s why you should listen twice as much as you talk.

I read this week that a bullfrog when it’s croaking that God created a muscle inside that bullfrog that goes to its brain that when a bullfrog is croaking it cannot hear that tone. It cannot hear the obnoxious noise that it’s making.

I know a lot of humans like that. You’re not intentionally obnoxious. You don’t get up in the morning and go, “I think I’m going to be irritating today. I think I’m going to tick everybody off. I think today I’m just going to be obnoxious.”

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No. You don't hear yourself. That's why the rest of us have to show you grace. That's why you need to show grace to other people and other people need to show it to you. Sometimes you don't even know what you're saying. You can't even hear it. We all need grace.

The Bible says this *"Be humble and gentle with each other. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love."* Circle "making allowance." It says if you're going to have a love that lasts you've got to learn to make allowances for the mistakes and the faults and everything else, the flubs, in other people's lives.

Kay knows that there are two times every week she needs to make allowance for me. It's when I'm the grumpiest. When I'm the most tired. And she makes allowance. She graciously loves me and shows grace and gives me a wide berth these two times a week.

One of them is Monday morning. Monday morning after doing six services and talking to people on the patio I'm always emotionally drained. She is very gentle and very kind to me. She makes allowances. If I say something cranky she just writes it off – "It's Monday morning. Rick is tired."

The other time that she writes off is Saturday afternoon right before I start the services because every Saturday afternoon I get PMS – Pre Message Syndrome.

Actually, you know what PMS stands for? Punish My Spouse! Do you know why it takes three women with PMS to change a light bulb? *It just does!!* Do you the difference between a terrorist and a woman with PMS? You can negotiate with a terrorist.

Don't write me! Men are just as temperamental. Ninety percent temper, ten percent mental. Don't write me! I know it's a serious illness!

Who do you need to show grace to this week? My pastor for the bad jokes he just told! But the truth is we just have to cut each other a little slack. That's the starting point. Show grace because love never stops being patient.

2. Here's the second key. **Lasting love** doesn't just extend grace, it **expresses faith**.

This is the kind of love if you want a marriage that lasts a lifetime or a friendship that lasts a lifetime, lasting love expresses faith. Faith and love are intertwined because love is built on trust. I'm talking about confidence. I'm talking about trusting people. Believing in people. That's what love is. I believe in you. I trust you. I have confidence in you.

Faith is not fearful and love is not fearful. It's not anxious. The Bible says *"There is no fear in love."* If you are afraid of someone, you don't love them. If they are afraid of you, they don't love you. The Bible says there is no fear in love. Love and fear are opposites. The Bible says that faith and love go together because love is built on trust.

When you trust somebody then you love them. You cannot love someone you don't trust. You can't. So if you're going to love somebody you have to not only extend them grace; you have to express faith. I believe in you. I trust you. I think you can do it. Because the Bible says this,

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“Love never stops believing.” The NIV translation says *“Love always trusts.”* Always trusts. The New Living Translation says, *“Love never loses faith.”*

There are three kinds of people in the world.

There are the gullible people who believe anything. They trust anything you say. By the way, did you know that the word “gullible” is not in the dictionary? Really! I’m serious. It’s not there. How many believe that? There are the gullible, who will fall for anything.

There are the cynics who believe nothing. They’re skeptical of everything. They are sarcastic. They’re cynical. They are untrusting. They are questioning of everything. They believe nothing. They’re suspicious.

There are the gullibles, and there are the cynics.

Then there are the healthy people. The healthy people are those who love. The Bible says *“Love always trusts...Love never stops believing... Love never loses faith.”* They give people the benefit of the doubt.

Let me ask you a question, do you think it’s wiser or more foolish to over trust? If you had to be a little more to the cynical side or a little bit more to the trusting side which is the wiser? To be a little bit more cynical or to be over trusting?

If you say “over cynical” you’re wrong. Because every single psychological study says it’s far better to be over trusting in life than it is to be overly cynical. It’s far better to trust too much.

This question was studied in numerous studies. *Psychology Today* magazine reported about an article in “Trust and its Consequences.” Dr. Julian Rotter of the University of Connecticut spent years studying the consequences of trust in human behavior, personality development and relationships. He developed a scale to determine the level of trust in a person’s life. Then he compared how trusting a person was with ten different common behaviors for healthy living. Let me give you a little True or False trust test.

Trusting persons tend to be more gullible.

Trusting people tend to have a lower IQ.

Trusting people live happier lives.

“Gullible” is not in the dictionary.

Number one and two are false. Number three is true. Study after study after study has shown that trusting people are consistently less gullible. People don’t pull the wool over their eyes. They have a higher IQ. The more trusting you are, the higher IQ. Study after study has shown this and they live much happier lives than cynical, questioning, suspicious people. The fact is it is always better to trust too much than too little. The Bible says and studies have shown that you are better adjusted psychologically by learning to trust.

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One of the key evidences of trust – and trust and love go together, as I said, you can't love somebody you don't trust. One of the key evidences of trust is your willingness to give other people a second chance when they blow it. How quickly are you willing to give other people a second chance? When somebody turns you the wrong way or says something about you and you write them down in your little black book – “They're off my group! I'm never going to that Bible study again, I'm never going back to that small group, I'm never going to serve in ministry with that person, you've got to watch out for that staff member, you've got to keep away from that neighbor.” – Then you're not very trusting, and you're not very loving. Because love gives people a second chance.

Anybody who's a coach and we've got dozens of coaches in our church – schools and sports areas – anybody who's a coach knows the quickest way to restore confidence after a fumble is give the kid the ball again on the very next play. Otherwise they start developing a phobia – “I'm going to drop it again! I'm going to drop it again!” The way you help a child get over a failure is put trust in them immediately again and get them started again. “Take the ball the next play. Sure you dropped it. Everybody drops the ball.” Give it to them again.

God says you want to build a lasting relationship you're going to have to learn to trust. You say “Rick, right now, I can't trust my husband/wife.” Then friend, I recommend you trust God. If you cannot trust your husband or your wife, you need to trust God because God knows what he's doing. If you put your trust in God, he can do things that you can't do in your husband or your wife's life. You trust God when you can't trust that person. Because God knows what he's doing.

Ten weeks ago my daughter-in-law Jaime, twenty-five years old, had her first health crisis. She's nearly died three times in the last two months. First she gave birth prematurely. She went into labor early, about six weeks early. That was going to be ok but the baby was breech. Then the baby got the cord wrapped around its neck and I understood that it had stopped breathing in the womb and it was going to die. So they wheeled her in very quickly and did an emergency C-section and saved the baby's life and of course Jaime lived. At that time we thought that's a problem. It's too bad that the baby had to come so early and it's too bad that the baby had to be delivered by C-section when she wanted to deliver in a normal way. We thought it was a problem. We now know that if the baby had come on time she would be having a baby and a brain surgery at the same time. We now know that if she had pushed instead of having a C-section, it would have killed her. Because nobody knew she had a brain tumor.

What you think is a problem is often a protection. In your life, what you think is a problem is often a protection and you need to trust God. He knows what he's doing and you don't. What you think is a problem is actually a protection and God is protecting you from something far worse.

The Bible says this in Isaiah 55. *“I don't think the way you think and the way you work isn't the way I work. For as the sky soars high above the earth so the way I work surpasses the way you work and the way I think is beyond the way you think.”* God says I know what I'm doing. Please trust me.

Love, whether you're loving God or somebody else, involves trust. The Bible says *“Love never stops believing.”*

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On top of that, God specializes in miracles and he can transform anything. What do you need a relationship miracle for? Do you need a miracle in your marriage right now? Do you need a miracle in a friendship? Do you need a miracle in a relationship with a child? Let me just suggest this: God's going to start on you first. Look for the changes in you before you expect the changes in somebody else. The miracle is going to happen first in you.

To be trusted is the greatest gift you can give somebody. It is the gift of trust. It is the gift of love.

I'll never forget twenty-nine years ago, I was twenty-five years old. We were living in Fort Worth, Texas and God put this crazy idea in my mind. I told it to Kay, "Honey, I think God wants us to move from Texas to Southern California and we're to start a church. Here's the problem: we don't have any money, we don't have any members, we don't have any buildings, we don't have any sponsorship, I don't know anybody in this city and I've never been a senior pastor before. What do you think?"

I'll never forget what my twenty-five year old wife said to me: "It scares me to death. But I believe in God and I believe in you, so let's go for it."

I've often wondered how would history be different if my wife at age twenty-five had said "No. I'm afraid. I'm scared. Let's don't do it." There would be no Saddleback Church. There would be no one hundred twenty acre campus. There would be no twenty thousand people baptized in the last ten years and over a hundred thousand names on the church role. There would be no Purpose Driven Life. There would be no PEACE Plan. There would be no half a million pastors trained in a hundred sixty two countries. History would be very, very different if my wife had said I don't trust you. I don't believe in you.

Women, those of you who are married, your husband is dying for you to say, I trust you. They are craving it. Your husband is craving it. It is more important than saying, I love you. Because when you say "I trust you," you are saying "I love you." Because love always trusts.

Who do you need to express trust in this week? To a child? "I know you can do it! To your wife. "I know you can do it!" Believing in somebody is what real love is all about. Lasting love extends grace when we blow it. Lasting love expresses faith and says, I trust you.

The Bible says this in Galatians 5:6 "*The only thing that counts* [you want to know what counts in life? Here it is:] *is faith expressing itself through love.*" Why? Because life is a school of learning how to trust and how to love. It extends grace, it expresses faith.

There's a third key in this verse.

3. Lasting love expects the best.

It's forward looking. It's optimistic. It's not stuck in the past. It's not always looking backward. Lasting love is hopeful. It is forward looking. It is positive. It is expecting the best. The Bible says this "*Love* [true love] *never stops hoping.*" The Living Bible translation "*Love always expects the best.*" Message paraphrase "*Love always looks for the best.*" It was

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the poet, who said, “Whoever loves believes in miracles.” Believes in the impossible.

I don’t know if you know this or not but people tend to live up to your expectations of them. We tend to shape the people around us by what we expect of them. Whatever you tend to expect much or little, people tend to live up to the expectations of other people. You set people up all the time. You set your husband up by what you expect of him and what you don’t expect of him. You set your wife up by what you expect and what you don’t expect. You set your children up by what you expect of them and what you don’t expect of them.

My friend Bruce Wilkinson who wrote that book The Prayer of Jabez, years ago was a new professor at a University in Portland, Oregon called Multnomah University. He said the first time he went there the faculty gathered like in the faculty lounge and they were passing out all the class assignments for the year. He was a brand new professor. Somebody looked at the classes that Bruce had been given and said, “Bruce, you’re a lucky dog! You’ve been given two of the Section A classes.” He said what’s that? He said, “Section A are the brightest students in the university. They’re the advance placement. Every year we figure out who are the kids who have the best test scores coming out of school and we put them into Section A classes. They’re a joy to teach. They’re smart, they’re bright, they’re funny, they’re engaged, they want to learn. You’re going to love having those classes and you’re lucky being a new professor getting Section A in your first year.

Bruce said throughout the entire year it was true. I absolutely loved teaching those kids. They were so much more fun than the other classes. They were smarter. They were brighter. They asked better questions. They were more intelligent. It was a joy to teach the Section A classes.

He said at the end of the year we were gathered in the faculty lounge again waiting for graduation to happen. I made the comment to my department supervisor “Man, I sure hope I get the Section A classes again next year!” The supervisor looked and said, “Bruce, there is no section A.” *Oh, yeah there is. One of the professors told me.* “No, Bruce, we canceled that program six years ago.”

He said I didn’t believe him. He said I went back and got out my grade books and sure enough those two classes got more A’s than the others. The others had B’s and C’s. But those two classes had A’s. Then I did the ultimate test of a professor. I weighed the term papers. I held them in both hands. The stack of the A section were far better. They wrote longer, they wrote more, they put more into it than the others.

He said, I had set them up with my expectations. I expected them to be better and they were.

Friends, who are you setting up? You can set people up with your nagging, which takes them down. “You always do *this*.” When you say that all you’re doing is guaranteeing the perpetuation of the past. You need to remove that from your vocabulary: “You *always* do this!”

What are you doing? You’re labeling, you’re setting them up for failure. Don’t tell it like it is. Tell it like it could be. That’s love. Love always expects the best. Love does not nag. Love says “I see what you could become. I see what you’re becoming. I believe in you. I expect the best.”

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So who are you programming with your expectations? You don't change bad people into good people by telling them they're bad. Which is, by the way, why I never preach that kind of message here. It doesn't work. What I talk about is how God sees us and what we could become.

Whatever you want the people in your life to become, treat them the way you want them to become, not the way they are.

Guys, you want your wife to treat you like a king? Treat her like a queen. It's real simple. Real simple. Treat her like a queen. Emphasize the positive. Forget the nagging. Tell it like it is? No. Tell it like it can be. Visualize potential. Start expecting the best from them.

There's a family in our church who went over to Chili's after one of the services. The waitress was real kind. The little boy was sitting there and she came up, "Now, what would you like sir?" She began to take his order down. When she walked away he said, "Mommy, she treated me like I was a human!"

Do you know what kills love? I used to do marriage counseling. I don't do it any more. But what kills marriage is not hate. What kills marriage is not discord. And it's not differences. What kills marriages is neglect. You stop doing the loving things that you did to woo the person and now that you've won them you stop doing it. You don't treat them that nicely any more. It is neglect.

I thought a lot about this the last twenty-two days as I sat twenty hours a day in a waiting room while Jaime was having her surgeries. I watched my son nearly lose his wife three times.

If I knew it was the last time I'd see you fall asleep
I'd tuck you in more tightly and pray your soul to keep.
If I knew it was the last time I'd see you out the door,
I'd hug and kiss you one more time and call you back for more.
If I knew it was the last time I'd get to share your day.
I know that I'd make certain it didn't slip away.
We assume we'll have tomorrow to correct an oversight.
That we'll always have another chance to make everything all right.
That there will always be another day to say that I love you.
There will always be another chance to ask, "What can I do?"
But just in case I might be wrong and today is all I get
I want to say that I love you so that you will not forget.
Tomorrow is not promised that we'll see another night.
Today could be my last chance to love and hold you tight.
Instead of waiting for tomorrow, show your love somehow.
For if tomorrow never comes you'll wish you'd done it now.
That you didn't take the extra time for a smile, a hug, or a kiss
Instead you were busy, too busy for the one that you now miss.
Hold your loved one close today and whisper in their ear
Tell them that you love them and why you hold them dear
Say "I'm sorry, please forgive me, you're the best, it's ok"

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So if tomorrow never comes you'll not regret today.

You know the old song, "What the World Needs Now is Love, Sweet Love," God's love is the only force that can ever get us out of the mess we're in today. I'll tell you, friends, I'm not putting my trust in any politician as the savior of the world.

Who do you need to expect the best from? Who in your life have you been not expecting the best from? Love expects the best. Love never stops hoping. It extends grace. It expresses faith. It expects the best.

4. It endures the worst.

Love endures the worst. Lasting love is persistent. It is determined. It is diligent. It is resolute. It is almost stubborn in its insistence that it will not give up. It will not give up on the relationship.

The Bible says this "*Love never gives up. Love endures through every circumstance.*" NIV "*Love always perseveres.*" The Message translation, "*Love never looks back but keeps going to the end.*"

One of the great secrets of a lasting love, a love that lasts a lifetime, is simply this: Stay put. Don't give up. Hang on. Don't let go. Refuse to give in.

I think God brought some of you here today just to hear that.

When God wants to make a mushroom, he takes six hours. When God wants to make an oak tree, he takes sixty years. Do you want your marriage to be a mushroom or an oak tree? Do you want your life to be a mushroom or an oak tree? There are things you will learn hanging on that you will never learn any other way. The purpose of marriage is not just to make you happy but to make you holy and teach you how to grow up. And to be unselfish. To be less thoughtful of yourself and more thoughtful of others. Great people are just ordinary people with an extraordinary amount of determination. They just don't know how to quit.

Anyone who's been around Saddleback knows the story of Kay and my early marriage. The first two years of our marriage were terrible. It was hell on earth. Really, it was. She would tell you this. And I was Satan! We just did not get along!

Kay and I loved each other. We got engaged and immediately I moved to Japan and she moved to Birmingham, Alabama. We were apart our entire engagement, so when we got married we really didn't know each other. It was like, and who are you? What we discovered is we were opposite in every single DNA cell of our beings. It was black and white, it was I say high, you say low, I say why you say I don't know. If we had taken the e-harmony test... *oh baby!* This is headed for disaster. We started arguing on the wedding night and from there it got worse. We loved each other but we did not get along. We just fought and fought and fought.

But the Bible says lasting love never gives up. We had made a vow. And we stood before a group of our friends and before God and we said "Till death do us part." And we said divorce is not an option. We closed the escape hatch on our marriage and we threw away the key. We said

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we're going to make this thing work if it kills us. It nearly did. I ended up in the hospital. Kay thought she was having a nervous breakdown. It was miserable. But we said for us divorce is off the table. We can't ever even talk about it. We can't ever even mention it. Because we have made a vow to God "Death do us part" and we take that serious. So divorce is not an option. Murder, yes but divorce no.

When we made that kind of commitment it forced us to grow up. I used to do marriage counseling. I'm going to give you twenty years of marriage counseling in two words: grow up. All marriage problems come down to this, I want my way, you want your way. You have to stop saying, I, me, and my and start saying we and ours. You must be willing to change for the benefit of somebody else. Pure and simple all marriage problems come down to pride, ego and selfishness. I want what I want, you want what you want, and neither of us is willing to change. Or one of us is and the other one isn't. It comes down to that. Grow up!

Kay and I went out and we got counseling. We said we can't afford it but we're going to get counseling. I don't understand people who say, "I can't afford counseling." How much is your happiness worth? Take out a loan! I was making eight hundred dollars a month as a twenty-five year old. Younger than that... I was twenty-one. Eight hundred dollars a month and my counseling bill was a hundred dollars a week. I put it on my Mastercard. I racked up a fifteen hundred dollar bill on Mastercard. I could say, Mastercard saved my marriage! I'm going to do an ad one day: Rick Warren, a saved marriage – priceless!

And it is priceless. I'd pay ten million bucks for what I've got today. I've been married thirty-three years. My wife is my best friend. She's my lover, she's my girlfriend. I'd rather talk to her far more than I'd rather talk to you! We do everything together. We love each other. It gets better every year. I'd pay whatever it cost. I'm so thankful that we didn't give up on our marriage but I'm even more thankful that God didn't give up on us.

Some of you are ready to give up.

I want to let go, but I won't let go.

There are battles to fight by day and by night for God and the right and I will never let go.

I want to let go but I won't let go.

I'm sick tis true, and worried and blue and worn through and through but I won't let go.

I want to let go, but I won't let go.

I will never yield. What? Lie down in the field? Surrender my shield? No. I will never let go.

I want to let go but I won't let go.

May this be my song, mid legions of wrong, oh, God! Keep me strong. But I'll never let go.

God brought some of you here today or you're watching this on the internet to say this to you: Keep on. Don't let go. Don't give up. Persevere. *Shoot!* Be stubborn about it. I'm not going to let go! Hang in there. Hang on!

I've been so proud of my son as I've watched him deal with nearly losing his wife three times in two months. And watched him grow in character and in trusting in God. This last week Josh

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told me, “Dad, I can’t handle this. But God can.” I want to read just one of his blog entries that he wrote this week.

“On my way to the hospital this morning a song really spoke to me. It’s been really hard for me to listen to music lately because it floods my heart with emotion. Music has a way of ministering to me in special ways so it’s been hard not to listen to it. But it’s been harder when I do listen to it. Dave Barnes has written a song called *Carry Me Through*. This morning it really spoke deeply to me as I listened to it while driving myself once again to the hospital and crying the entire trip.

There's a mountain here before me
And I'm going to climb it
With strength not my own
And He is going to lead me
Where the mountain beats me
Carry me through
Carry me through

There's a river here before me
And I'm gonna cross it
With strength not my own
He's gonna save me
When the river takes me.
Carry me through
Carry me through

Oh Lord be gentle
Cause I'm just a man
Please don't crush me
With heavenly hands

Oh Lord remember
That I've tried so hard
I'm walking towards your kingdom Lord
Hallelujah
Hallelujah
You will carry me through.

Learning to love is the single greatest lesson in life. Learning to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And learning to love everybody else. It’s why God put you on this planet. The only way you will ever learn how to love is by loving, when you don’t feel like loving. When people are unlovable and unlovely and unloving and unloved. That’s where you learn real love. It’s easy to love cool people like you.

As I pointed out when we started, these four choices are the exact way God loves you. God just expects you to do with others what he has done with you. God has extended you grace. And he has forgiven you and he’s said I sent Jesus Christ to die for all your sins. He extends you grace.

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If you got what you deserved you wouldn't be sitting there right now. You wouldn't be alive. He has extended you grace. He wants you to do that with others.

He expresses faith in you. Did you know that God believes in you? He believed in you enough to create you, to love you, to die for you, to send his Holy Spirit to live in you. He believed in you enough to give you a freedom of choice knowing that you full well could thumb your nose to God and live a self-centered life. You need to believe in the God who believes in you. He expresses faith.

He expects the best. He knows what you're capable of. He knows you're not living up to your potential and he doesn't nag you about it. He says this is what I see in you. He always has hope that you're going to turn your life completely over to him and he expects the best. God has endured the worst from you and put up with it all and he's never given up on you.

We've been studying now for six weeks 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter on love in the Bible. I want to end by reading a paraphrase of this chapter on love.

"Because God loves me he is slow to lose patience with me. Because God loves me he takes the circumstances of my life and he uses them in a constructive way for my growth. Because God loves me he does not treat me as an object to be possessed or manipulated. Because God loves me he has no need to impress me with how great and powerful he is because he's God. Nor does he belittle me as his child in order to show me how important he is. Because God loves me he is for me and he wants to see me mature and develop in his love. Because God loves me he does not keep score of all my sins and then beat me over the head with them whenever he gets the chance."

This is the real secret to learning a lasting love. Letting God's love flow through you. The Bible says "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*" This is the secret of lasting love. It takes Christ's love in you. Human love wears out. That's why we've got those divorce statistics. But Christ's love is eternal. Before you can offer it to others you've got to get it in you.

God brought you here for this service. Some of you, who are men who have been coming for days or weeks, maybe even months to Saddleback. God brought you here today to say, today's your day. This is the day you're stepping across the line. This is the day you're going to say I'm going to become a great lover and I'm going to start by getting God's love in my life. I'm going to open my life to Jesus Christ and let him fill me with his love in ways that I can't love. There are some women here and some young women, even some girls, who are going to say today, I open my life to the love of Jesus Christ so that he can love other people through me.

Prayer:

Would you pray this prayer in your heart? Dear God I need to feel your love. Today I'm opening myself up in a way like never before. Put your love in every room in my heart. Fill my mind, my life, my body, my hands, my feet with your love. Jesus Christ, thank you for loving me. Thank you for creating me. Thank you for dying for me. Thank you for forgiving me. Thank you for giving the promise of your Spirit to be put inside me. I don't understand it all but I want to be filled with your love and I want to learn to love you and I

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want to learn to love the people in my life. Forgive me for my immature love. I want to become a mature lover. I ask you to do in me and in my relationships what I could never do on my own. I want to learn to offer grace. I want to learn to express faith and trust. I want to learn to expect the best. I want to learn to endure the worst even in sickness and in health. I pray this prayer, humbly, in Jesus' name. Amen.